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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of the Speech Communication Association regarding issues of assessment and testing in speech communication in the public schools. The paper describes the genesis of the 1990 summer assessment conference for oral communication skills (held in Denver, Colorado), outlines the goals undertaken, enumerates the resolutions taken, and reviews the outcomes of the conference. The paper also discusses possible future actions of the Committee on Assessment and Testing based on this conference. (KEH)

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THE 1990 SUMMER CONFERENCE ON THE ASSESSMENT OF ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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It is my task this afternoon to describe the genesis of the 1990 summer assessment conference (referred to hereafter as the "Denver Conference"), to outline the goals undertaken, to briefly describe of the outcomes of the conference, and to describe possible future actions of the Committee on Assessment and Testing based on this conference.

The 1990 summer assessment conference had its beginnings at the SCA Summer Conference on Communication Education held in Flagstaff. At that conference, the assembled group approved a resolution that read:

> Communication is complex, transactional, and contextually based. Previous experience in developing standardized assessment has met with problems of validity, reliability, feasibility, ethics, and cultural biases.
>
> No single communication assessment instrument can meet all of the objectives of effective assessment, and it would be unproductive to spend time and energy on developing such an instrument.
>
> The best hope for good assessment is the classroom teacher who is qualified in communication in an instructional setting where communication principles and skills are taught. In the classroom, the teacher has the best opportunity to observe the student over time within contextual variations. It would be a better use of our time to empower the classroom teacher.
>
> Resolution: A national conference on assessment should be help during the summer of 1990 to consider and facilitate empowering all teachers in assessment. The conference should:
>
> 1. Discuss philosophical and ethical issues of assessment such as purpose, method, use of data, etc.
> 2. Review existing assessment instruments to categorize them by type and purpose.
> 3. Generate sample objectives--specify objectives.
> 4. Develop workshops, guidelines, and publications which would assist teachers to assess communication skills at all educational levels.
> 5. Address the need for quality control of the practitioners of assessment.
> 6. Investigate strategies for dealing with political pressures from policy makers who want a low cost assessment instrument.

At the Denver Conference we used this resolution as a starting point for the conference. This charge, however, proved to be a formidable task. The entire area of assessment and testing in speech communication, particularly as it relates to the measurement of educational progress in the public schools is fraught with confusion, conflicting issues, and differing needs. The area is also one of pressure for our Association. A variety of governmental, educational, and professional agencies all have intense interest in answering the questions of assessing speaking and listening skills. Accountability, value-added testing, and testing the outcomes of education are all forces that are gathering momentum in this country. We do not have answers to all of the questions. In fact, unanswered questions in assessment may be impeding progress in other areas of speech communication, especially in curriculum development in the public schools.

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The assessment focus group at the Flagstaff conference and the participants of the Denver Conference each had these thoughts in mind as the assessment conference was developed. The Flagstaff group defined issues, needs, and potential assessment products. These are briefly described below.

ISSUES

The issues in the assessment of speech communication are many. We attempted to develop these so that a variety of content areas and educational contexts would be covered. Eight such issues were identified and discussed.

1. The first issue was the content of the assessment. What should be assessed? Gray (1988) pointed out in his paper for the conference that "speech communication assessment in elementary schools . . . tends to determine only whether or not specific communication variables have been produced at a given moment in time (p. 1)." The number of potential skills to be examined "at a given moment in time," the range of educational levels, and the variety of contexts in which speaking and listening occur make this a very difficult problem. Different states require or mandate different objectives for the public school level. Various universities require many skills ranging from public speaking to interpersonal communication and a variety of skills in between. Coordination of all of these levels and contexts is difficult enough in curriculum development. It seems virtually impossible in assessment.
2. The format of the assessment procedure was another source of difficulty. Various economic and logistical factors press for an uncomplicated process. Validity factors press, on the other hand, for extensive behavioral tests. The factors on both sides argue for a possible range of options that runs from paper and pencil test through to performance tests. But, as Snively (1988) points out, "Creating such a test (paper and pencil) is not wrong. It is also not complete (p. 4)." That seemed to be a key point. No option was complete. Must we construct a number of different types of tests to cover different purposes? This issue was not an easy one.
3. A related issue involved the "ideal" assessment procedure versus a "practical" one. As professionals in speech communication, we have certain beliefs as to what constitutes an ideal assessment procedure, yet practical limitations may not allow for the ideal. The ideal may not be practical, and the practical may not be valid. How do we achieve a balance in the tension between the two?
4. The fourth issue discussed involved the purpose of the testing and the use of the data. Professionals in speech communication have specific purposes for testing; professionals in other disciplines may have different purposes, with some similar to and others at odds with our own. Potential purposes include; formative assessment, summative assessment, testing to check the effectiveness of instruction, testing that assesses the effectiveness of a school or state program of instruction, testing that simply helps a student improve, etc. Can any single test cover all of the potential purposes?
5. The next issue seemed to be peculiar to speech communication. Most of testing in other disciplines focuses on the individual skill and/or knowledge in a particular area. Speech communication presents a particular problem in that it is basically interactional in nature. Can a test be constructed to reflect that interactional bias? Or must we focus on individual skill?

6. Speech communication also presents opportunities for cultural bias in testing. A major issue was the preservation of the integrity of the assessment procedure while remaining sensitive to the potential of cultural, ethnic, and gender bias.

7. The seventh issue discussed was the audience for the test results. Who is the test designed to inform? Is the test developed for teachers? administrators? state officials? politicians? The audience determines many of the factors surrounding the development of the test.

8. The last issue discussed was the issue of the relationships of the various agencies and groups associated with any testing procedure. Can we develop anything that will satisfy all the groups involved?

These, then, represent the primary issues discussed in our first meeting.

NEEDS

The next major area discussed was the area of "needs." What do teachers, administrators, and state officials all need in the area of assessing speaking and listening skills? The following needs were identified.

1. There is a need for a statement, approved by the Speech Communication Association, that describes the Association's philosophy on testing procedures. This statement would describe SCA's posture on assessment and suggest where and how assessment procedures could be procured by interested parties. Such a statement could and should be distributed widely in the educational community.

2. There is need for an inexpensive, reliable, valid instrument for assessing speaking and listening skills that could be used in quantity. The problem here was stated accurately by Yokum in her paper for the conference: "If the competency and skill cannot be assessed by a pencil and paper test, it probably will not be taught (p. 2)." Meeting this need may do a great deal to support curriculum development in speaking and listening.

3. There is a need for an expensive, contextually valid performance instrument that would be able to assess a wide range of speaking and listening skills reliably and validly.

4. There is a need for a method to effectively assess a sample of a class, school, or school district reliably and validly.

5. There is a need for a range of valid, reliable instruments for various levels and abilities. This range would include instruments designed to test basic skills, but also instruments designed to test the upper range of ability in speech communication.

6. There is a need for a set of guidelines for classroom teachers to assist in developing their own formative and summative assessment procedures for classroom assessment of speaking and listening skills. Yokum gave a succinct rationale for this set of guidelines. "Elementary teachers, especially, who are not trained to teach or assess speaking and listening competencies and skills will tend to ignore them (p. 2)." Taylor stated in his paper that a "preference for local assessment is supported by the Florida Commissioner of Education who has asserted that speaking and listening skills can best be taught and monitored by individual teachers in each institution (p. 5)."

7. There is a need for an informative, public relations campaign for administrators and state officials on the need for, procedures in, and value of speaking and listening skill assessment including the realities and options. Taylor put it this way: "The real challenge facing our profession is finding appropriate assessment procedures that are acceptable to administrators of state testing programs. We desperately need a response to the state administrator that says he or she cannot undertake a wide-scale assessment of speaking and listening because the costs and practical problems associated with this are simply too great (p. 4)."
8. There is a clear need for research on instrument effectiveness for all speaking and listening skill assessment instruments. Gray (1988) stated "we need assessment procedures which will enable us to specify the change in students that occurs as a consequence of specific forms of speech instruction (p. 1)." We need to know if what we do has any value for students.
9. There is a need for a statement on how the results of various assessments can be best communicated to others.
10. There is a need for procedures that test effectively across a variety of contexts.

These, then, represent the primary needs identified.

PRODUCTS

The third area described was the area of potential outcomes and products. What products should SCA make available to interested professionals? What should be the outcomes of this conference regarding assessment? What goals should be developed for SCA regarding assessment? Six products were identified.

1. A single, nationally normed test of speaking and listening skills.
2. An assessment guide book for the classroom teacher.
3. Identification and listing of resources in assessment published in a format that would be readily used by classroom teachers.
4. The development of a format and pattern for workshops on assessment that would be endorsed and run by speech communication professionals for classroom teachers at all levels.
5. The development of a variety of public relations material on the positions that SCA would take on the various issues in the assessment of speaking and listening skills.
6. An Association endorsed position statement on assessment. There is a clear need for the discipline as a whole to begin to work toward some agreement on what to assess and how to assess it.

These, then, were the products that were suggested.

PRELIMINARY DECISIONS

The Flagstaff group recommended against , and the Denver conference generally concurred, developing a national test for speaking and listening skills. While many individuals claim a need for a national test of speaking and listening skills that would reliably and validly assess these skills, and a wide variety of people have indicated that such a test would be highly desirable, the conference participants decided that such a test would be impractical. The

wide variety of factors impinging on the assessment procedures, including coverage of the wide range of objectives, cultural issues, issues surrounding the levels associated with any test, etc., mitigated against the development of a single test.

In place of a national test, the participants decided to put the focus on the classroom teacher. We decided that SCA should do what it could to empower the classroom teacher to be an effective assessor of speaking and listening skills. This decision was not made without controversy. Some participants felt that only speech communication teachers should be "empowered" to assess speaking and listening skills. Others felt that we should help each teacher, particularly at the elementary levels, to effectively assess the skills. One question that was raised was: "would we be putting ourselves out of a job by doing this?" At least some of the participants felt that this might be a possibility. Others felt it unlikely as most teachers would probably be unwilling to take on a new task and would prefer it be left to trained professionals. Still, as Gray (1988) pointed out "we should train speech teachers to conduct outcomes and program assessment, but this approach is insufficient to meet school needs for a number of reasons. First, the number of speech teachers is not likely to increase significantly in the next several years, and there are not enough speech teachers in every district to conduct program and outcomes assessment (p. 4)." Gray goes on to point out that "speech communication assessment in elementary and secondary schools, then, could be improved most significantly by (1) training both speech and non-speech teachers how to conduct value-added and instructional outcomes assessment in our discipline, and (2) training non-speech teachers, particularly at elementary grade levels, how to provide appropriate speaking and listening skill instruction as well as conducting necessary assessment (p. 5)."

ORGANIZATION OF THE DENVER CONFERENCE

Various calls for participation in the Denver Conference were given through SCA publications and conventions. Respondents were organized into working groups. The group charges are described below.

Group One. This group would work on the advisability and feasibility of a paper/pencil test of oral communication skill concepts. The test could be used as a screening device for entry into basic skill college courses, exit from a basic skill requirement, or as a component of a skills test.

Group Two. This group would work on the public speaking skills portion of a skills test of oral communication. A position should be taken on which skills should be assessed, what criteria should be used to assess them, and suggested procedures. Perhaps prototypes should be developed and recommended.

Group Three. This group would develop a draft of an SCA position on the national testing of oral communication at both the public school level and at the post-secondary level. Some individuals suggest that we do not want to develop a national test, but to encourage situation-specific testing. Others suggest that we need a valid, reliable, nationally normed test of oral communication. Another factor to consider is a "middle-ground" position of recommending not a testing procedure, but a common set of evaluation criteria endorsed by SCA.

Group Four. This group's task was to draft the technical assistance manual for the public school classroom teacher who wishes to construct reliable and valid in-class assessment and evaluation procedures to support instruction in oral communication.

Group Five. This group was charged with of developing a clear, easy to use reference guide for teachers at any level of the available resources in the assessment of oral communication. This group's purpose is differed from group four's in that it would focus only on available resources. It may turn out later that we will combine the products of groups four and five into one publication. The product probably should include a rationale for assessment.

Group Six. This group would focus on college course-specific assessment in areas other than public speaking. These areas probably should include interpersonal communication, listening, perhaps small group communication, and any other areas the committee sees fit to explore. Product here could be a listing of resources, model programs, and suggested procedures. If this task develops into one that begins to cover too many areas, the committee may wish to divide itself into small groups to focus efforts.

Group Seven. This group would focus on program and field assessment procedures. This could include a definition of necessary speech communication competencies for undergraduate majors, a review of major general assessment tests from ETS and ACT, suggestions for departmental review of majors, and ways of meeting assessment procedures mandated by states and accrediting agencies. This group also should probably examine the feasibility of developing a statement of goals and objectives for undergraduate speech communication majors that could be adopted by SCA.

The groups spent some time working on their charges before the conference began. During the conference, some of the above groups merged with others and new tasks were outlined. The products of the groups took the form of resolutions. These resolutions are described below.

The Denver conference participants received advice and counsel from a number of very special guests, and the products of the conference reflect their advice. We are indebted to the following people: Jim Gaudino and Jim Chesbro of the SCA national office; Charles McClain of the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education; Barbara Lieb-Brilhart of the US Office of Education; Pam Cooper, Chair of EPB; Shirley Haley-James, President Elect of the National Council of Teachers of English; Judy Arter of the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory; Donna Surgis-Tatum of the University of Chicago.

Jim Gaudino and Jim Chesbro of the SCA National Office provided comments that had a measurable impact on the deliberations of the groups. One of their points concerned three levels of phenomena that needed to be addressed through assessment--skills/performance, cognition, and motivation. We need instruments in all three areas, especially motivation.

Based on the deliberations at the conference, the conference participants approved the following resolutions. Some of these will be described in more detail in this program and in our second program tomorrow.

Resolution #1

A CAT Subcommittee will be charged with continuing the development and testing an EPB sponsored and SCA distributed manual for inclass speech evaluation for the college sophomore (grade 14) that is consistent with (1) the communication competency literature and approaches to assessment and (2) the proposed SCA Policy on Criteria for the Assessment of Oral Communication. The general purposes of the manual will be (1) evaluation of speaking skills and performance in the classroom, and (2) pre (testing out) and/or post (exit) assessment of public speaking skills and performance in the basic and/or public speaking course.

Resolution #2
SCA should adopt the following policy:
SCA POLICY ON ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

Whereas, the purpose of the Speech Communication Association is to promote the study, criticism, research, teaching, and application of the artistic, humanistic, and scientific principles of communication;
Whereas, effective communication requires that the responses and feedback of receivers be recognized, understood, and utilized;
Whereas, feedback should be explicit, systematic, just, and accountable in education contexts;
Whereas, feedback in education contexts often assumes the form of formal assessment and testing;

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that the Speech Communication Association recognizes and affirms that: Periodic assessment of oral communication competency should occur during the educational careers of students. An effective systematic assessment program minimally should occur at educational levels K, 4, 8, 12, 14, and 16.

Resolution #3

Please see attached material.

Resolution #4
SCA should adopt the following policy:
SCA POLICY ON USES OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The Conference on Assessment recommends that the Speech Communication Association adopt the following policy on uses of oral communication competency assessment results:

The results of student oral communication competency assessment should be used in an ethical, non-discriminatory manner for such purposes as:

A. Diagnosing student strengths and weaknesses;
B. Planning instructional strategies to address student strengths and weaknesses;
C. Certification of student readiness for entry into and exit from programs and institutions;
D. Evaluating and describing overall student achievement;
E. Screening students for programs designed for special populations;
F. Counseling students for academic and career options;
G. Evaluating the effectiveness of instructional programs.

No single assessment instrument is likely to support all these purposes. Moreover, instruments appropriate to various or multiple purposes typically vary in length, breadth/depth of content, technical rigor, and format.

Resolution #5
SCA should adopt the following policy:
SCA POLICY ON INVOLVEMENT IN ASSESSMENT OF ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

Whereas, the purpose of the Speech Communication Association is to promote the study, criticism, research, teaching, and application of the artistic, humanistic, and scientific principles of communication;Whereas, whenever possible, standardized tests should be designed by professional educators under the direction of professional education associations,

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that:

SCA should create a National Center for Communication Assessment which shall (with the advice and consent of the SCA Educational Policies Board) among other functions, collect descriptive statistical data based on results,

assess the adherence of assessment instruments and procedures to appropriate SCA criteria, test instruments and procedures against the SCA approved guidelines for completeness and appropriateness, recommend adjustments in assessment instruments, disseminate guidelines for the process of selecting and developing instruments and guidelines regarding the use of assessment results, and develop a lending library of resources in oral communication assessment.

The SCA President, in conjunction with the CAT and EPB should direct all units of the association to participate in the development of appropriate concepts of and relationships among the performance, knowledge, and motivational domains in their areas of interest. All units should also develop a variety of methods appropriate for assessing these concepts. The results from these efforts should be widely disseminated.

Resolution #6

Resolved that the Conference on Assessment affirm the following statement of work yet to be done:

As the Conference on Assessment discussed issues in the assessment of oral communication, it became apparent to us that there was much work yet to be done to make assessment of oral communication meaningful, but which was beyond the scope of the conference. Among the work yet to be accomplished are the following:
1) The SCA should develop clearly defined guidelines for oral communication curricula within the general education of students at all levels of education, K-6, 7-12, and college,
2) The SCA should develop core goals and objectives with sample curricula for each college speech communication major program that corresponds to an SCA Division.

Resolution #7:

1. WHEREAS in our attempt to recommend goals, objectives and procedures for assessment, we found the SCA publications classroom assessment of oral communication skills contained multiple directions and perspectives as well as some contradictory information.

2. WHEREAS SCA already has created a body of formal assessment documents for K-12.

3. WHEREAS it has come to our attention that various external agencies such as state boards of education have already prepared or are preparing technical manuals on curriculum development and assessment for speech communication in grades K-12.

4. BE IT RESOLVED that CAT establish a sub-committee with the following responsibilities:
   A. Review the SCA competencies for K-6 and 7-12, and synthesize those competencies for K-4, 5-8 and 9-12, creating new competencies when necessary.
   B. Review SCA documents on K-12 competencies and assessment to avoid duplication and inconsistencies.
   C. Identify a formal battery of assessment tools which a classroom teacher can use.
   D. Present the manual to CAT at its meeting at the 1991 SCA Convention, and upon approval, submit to EPB for appropriate subsequent action.
5. Procedures recommended for enactment:
   A. The committee should have at least 6 members, but not more than 9.
   B. The committee membership should include at least 2 members selected from this conference group, a college teacher-trainer, and EPB representative and several K- 12 teachers.

Resolution #8

1 . Whereas we recognize few teachers of speech in K- 12 are certified speech educators.
2. Whereas we find an absence of material to assist these teachers in assessing their student's communication competencies.

3. Whereas we recognize that formal assessment is not a complete teaching tool.
4. Be it resolved that CAT establish a committee to create a technical assistance manual relating to the five functional competencies* of communication with curriculum and assessment of that curriculum. This manual should be presented at the CAT meeting during the 1991 SCA convention and upon approval be submitted to the Educational and Instructional Publication Series for further action.
5. FUNCTIONS for enactment:
   A. This committee described in resolution (7, 5B) should be given the charge for this manual.
   B. The committee should gather and assimilate procedural materials of external agencies and organizations.
   C. The committee should create demonstrators for each functional competency.
   D. The committee should create examples for different levels of competency for each of the functional competencies.
   E. The committee should seek review of the informal technical manual from appropriate classroom teachers, especially English/ Language Arts teachers.

Resolution #9

Be resolved that the Speech Communication Association should not endorse any assessment instrument and should revoke any past endorsements of particular instruments. Rather SCA should solicit and disseminate information about all assessment instruments that meet Speech Communication Association criteria for assessment instruments of oral communication and other procedural guidelines that may be adopted by Speech Communication Association in the future.

Resolution #10

Whereas the Speech Communication Association community has generally failed to define who it is and what it does;
Whereas available oral communication assessment instruments and procedures tend to indirectly and perhaps inappropriately, define the field of speech communication,
Whereas sound assessment practices require a clearly defined content focus,
Whereas there has been a proliferation of relatively discrete content areas as reflected in Speech Communication Association's typography of divisions and commissions,including forensics, instructional development, international and intercultural communication, interpersonal and small group interaction, interpretation, mass communication, organizational communication, public address, rhetorical and communication theory,speech and language sciences,theater, communication and aging, communication and law,communication apprehension and avoidance, communication ethics,experiential learning in communication, freedom of speech, government communication, health communication,intrapersonal communication processes,peace communication, and public relations,

Be It Resolved That
CAT contact Michael Obsorne to determine results of recent survey of definitions, then determine how these definitions impact the work of the Committee on Assessment and Testing.

Resolution #11

Whereas assessment is critical to the field and the outcomes of this conference need to be discussed among the various constituents of Speech Communication Association;

Whereas such discussions would expedite the development of a final product that is representative of the Speech Communication Association membership

Be it Resolved that by October 1990 Assessment Conference Steering Committee distribute to the chairs of all Speech Communication Association divisions and sections and the chair of the States Advisory Committee and other pertinent constituents of Speech Communication Association the Resolutions that have come out of this conference for distribution to their members.

Resolution #12

A Resolution to Endorse Principles for Program Assessment

Whereas, most colleges and universities are engaged in assessment activities, some of which are focused upon evaluation of programs and departments, and

Whereas, presently communication department faculty and administrators have few resources and little guidance in planning and conducting such program assessments.

Be it resolved that: The following principles and practices be endorsed and disseminated by the Speech Communication Association to appropriate college deans and department chairs.

Principles for Program Assessment

1. Assessment should be based on goals/objectives defined and operationalized by the faculty of specific programs within the context of a particular department.
2. Assessment is an ongoing process conducted for the purpose of program improvement and student learning within a particular institution.
3. Assessment needs to provide data relevant to student performance, knowledge, & motivation. (Motivation is an affective state related to the willingness to communicate and the valuing of communication activities.)
4. Assessment should recognize the competing demands of constituencies involved: graduate schools, employers, internship supervisors, professional associations, other departments served by communication courses, and students.
5. Assessment should be based on multiple methods appropriate to a given program rather than any single test.
6. Assessment instruments & procedures should be externally validated.
7. Assessment data collection, interpretation, and storage should be the province of the faculty in the department.
8. Program assessment is the role, right, and responsibility of every faculty member.
9. The learning environment is enhanced by the interrelationship among instruction, research, creative activities, and service goals. Therefore, a program's collective contribution to its multiple constituencies through research, creative activities, and service should ultimately be part of program assessment.

Implementation Steps for Resolution #12

SCA should have an active role in enacting the nine principles of program assessment (described in Resolution #12). The following action steps are recommended to support these principles.
1. The EPB should identify guidelines for the development for a core curriculum.
2. The EPB should initiate a core of communication competencies for college and university general eduction programs.
3. The SCA Executive Director should initiate discussions with other professional organizations regarding the communication needs of their members and, if possible, negotiate a cooperative development of means to satisfy these needs.
4. Because oral communication is an integral part of general education, experience in a basics course should be supplemented by classroom reinforcement throughout the college or university. Therefore, EPB should develop guidelines for such programs as speaking across the curriculum and assessment centers.
5. The EPB should initiate a process to identify minimum criterion-referenced standards of knowledge, performance,and motivation necessary for successful performance in graduate programs to assist undergraduate programs to develop and assess outcome goals.
6. SCA Educational Services should expand the consulting services directory to include individuals with expertise in program assessment.
7. Members of the Denver Conference working group should prepare a handout of recommendations and model samples consistent with the nine principles to provide assistance for departments engaged in program assessment.

RESOLUTION #13

The Committee on Assessment and Testing should seek legislative council approval to ask each section/division/committee to submit test items in their areas. CAT would act as a clearinghouse for these efforts.

CONCLUSION

Work has begun on some of these resolutions. Others are working their way through the SCA approval process. If you have an opinion on any of these, please get contact me. If you wish to assist us in developing work on any of these, again, please do not hesitate to contact me. CAT needs the assistance. We believe that these resolutions and the work emanating from them will have a significant impact on SCA. We look forward to continuing the work already begun.

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